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Heavy flood waters claim lives

JAMAICA

KINGSTON: Flood rains are being blamed for the deaths of at least six persons in the central parish of Clarendon.

A 68-year-old farmer of Bog Hole went to help another farmer rescue cattle from a flooded area. He went into rising waters to cut the rope from one of the cows but disappeared into the

murky waters.

Another man died trying to save his car from being washed away.

Two students wandered off in the heavy rain near Toll Gate and did not return. The body of one of them was found on a nearby farm.

Another teenager went crab hunting with a group of friends near Bushy Park but became entangled in fallen power lines and was electro-

cuted.

Meanwhile, a reduction in the budget for the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) has led to sharp criticism from the opposition Jamaica Labour Party. This reduction comes after large losses from natural disasters in 2001.

Pearnel Charles, Jamaica Labour Party spokesperson on Local Government, said the ODPEM is severely limited.

"Given all the emergencies we have been having, I am afraid that we do not have a proper budget for the ODPEM to do what it needs

to do, not only in responding to, but in mitigating the effects of some of the disasters," Charles said.

Charles said the ODPEM depends on local and overseas grants and that it was the government's responsibility to make the necessary budgetary allocations or the overseas contacts to acquire these grants.

"The success or failure of ODPEM depends on the government's willingness or ability to finance its operations. The government has to be prepared to handle these emergencies because we are dealing with human life."